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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BELGRADE 000839

SIPDIS

AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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SUBJECT: (Jovanka Broz) Tito Speaks

REF: 07 BELGRADE 1328

CLASSIFIED BY: Jennifer Brush, Charge D'Affaires; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Summary

¶1. (C) During a September 2 uninhibited one and a half hour conversation, former Yugoslav President Tito's widow, Jovanka Broz Tito dished to Charge on the Russians -- Tito never liked them, Slovenes -- they were never committed to the Yugoslav idea, and those who plotted and carried out her house arrest 32 years ago, thereby denying a successor following Tito's death in 1980. This meeting was set up and attended by Serbian Labor and Social Policy Rasim Lajic, the only man (though a Muslim Serb), according to Jovanka, capable of running Serbia. This was Jovanka's first meeting with a foreign diplomat since she was placed under house arrest in 1977. She welcomed the opportunity to meet again and asked Charge to acquaint President Obama with the abysmal treatment she, a former First Lady, had received in Belgrade for three decades. End Summary.

American Father

¶2. (C) Jovanka Broz Tito had been kept incommunicado under house arrest since she was suspected of plotting to succeed her husband in 1977, three years prior to Tito's death. During the past few months she has gradually re-emerged, first appearing with Minister Ljajic in a "Politika" front page interview, and then subsequently on a popular weekend talk show where she showed viewers the squalor she had been living in for the past 30 plus years. She made the news again when she was issued an ID card and passport, the first such documents she's received since hers were confiscated in 1977. Jovanka's public re-emergence has been accompanied by a film library of 700 hours of footage documenting Jovanka's travels with her husband on state visits throughout the world, and also the lavish receptions the Yugoslav President provided to visiting dignitaries ranging from Emperor Haile Selassie to Richard Nixon. These images of Jovanka bejeweled and bedecked on private yachts and jets, strolling on Tito's private island of Brioni, being welcomed by Egyptian President Nasser, Indian President Indira Gandhi, and Indonesian President Sukarno, contrast dramatically

with her current state in a dilapidated villa pleading with Minister Ljajic for basic utilities.

13. (C) In spite of earlier signals that contact with the Charge could make her predicament worse, Jovanka did not seem at all nervous or reticent during the meeting. With an encyclopedic knowledge of world events, since she and her husband played a role in many of them, Jovanka displayed a razor-sharp mind and considerable charisma. She surprised both Ljajic and Charge by beginning the conversation saying her father had been an American citizen. She said he had spent 25 years doing manual labor in the United States, only coming back twice in that time to check on Jovanka and her two brothers. Given this predisposition to like America, Jovanka said her best state visit ever was with John F. Kennedy a month before he was assassinated. According to Jovanka, she and her husband at that time spent 12-13 days in the United States, including a memorable trip to visit George Kennan at Princeton, where the Titos were surrounded by "America's most glittering minds." She said she also enjoyed their visit with President Nixon and noted that was her last state visit before her detention.

Slovenes and Plots

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14. (C) Jovanka said her 1977 detention was a plot by then Slovenian Communist Presidency member Stane Dolanc. Dolanc and then Yugoslav Army Commander General Ljubisic (Serb) feared Jovanka was positioning herself to succeed Tito, then already in his 80's. Jovanka said the "trend" in those days was for wives to succeed their husbands and that her personal popularity was such that her succeeding Tito would have been "logical," though she claims she never maneuvered for such an outcome. Tito was too weak to reverse the plot, she said, and although she spoke with him by telephone during the first year of detention, by the time he went to the Military Hospital in Ljubljana where he subsequently died, she was no longer in contact with Tito or anybody.

15. (C) In response to Charge's rendition of former Yugoslav President (and father of Serbian nationalism) Dobrica Cosic's theory that Tito and his main theoretician (Slovenian) Edvard Kardelj had planned that Yugoslavia would break up following their deaths (reftel), Jovanka denied this was Tito's plan. She claimed he had devoted his entire career to keeping Yugoslavia together because the region had too often served as a slaughter-house and he was determined to give his people a better life. She agreed, however (and to Ljajic's surprise), that this was Kardelj's plan. "The Slovenes were never committed to Yugoslavia," she said, they were fed up with being Austrian subjects, didn't want to be Italian subjects, but also soon became tired of being part of Yugoslavia." Jovanka said Tito often had harsh words with Kardelj, reminding him that Slovenian products only really had a market in Yugoslavia, they were not competitive to the north - Austria, Italy and Switzerland. Furthermore Slovenian industry could not function without raw materials from the south.

16. (C) But was Tito anti-Serbian, Charge asked, as Cosic also claimed, using as evidence the purge of ethnic Serb Internal Affairs Minister Alexander Rankovic in 1967, and the subsequent 1974 Constitution providing autonomy to Kosovo and Vojvodina. Tito was not anti-Serbian, Jovanka claimed, even though his mother was Slovenian and his father was Croatian. Rankovic was purged because he was caught bugging Tito's office and residence, Jovanka reminded Charge. "Tito was always complaining that Rankovic took his spying too far." Kardelj, on the other hand, was anti-Serbian and

frequently advised Tito that a small Serbia was good for Yugoslavia. "Tito would just tell him to shut up," Jovanka said. She insisted, however, that the intent of the 1974 Constitution was not to contain Serbia.

17. (C) Jovanka said that the post-Tito rotating presidency idea was not Tito's and she agreed it was a recipe for failure. She denied the idea was cooked up during Tito's months of dying at Ljubljana Hospital, but was something even she had heard about before her detention. Tito was unable to stop the idea by that time, she said, because he already was too old and weak. She said she also did not know if Tito had a preference for his successor, however, but noted that by then his closest confident was Croatian Communist Party Presidency member Vladimir Bakaric.

Russians, Chetniks and Boys will be Boys

18. (C) In response to Charge's observation that Serbia was in an awkward situation having to welcome Russian President Vladimir Medvedev "in commemoration" of the Soviet Army's assistance in liberating Belgrade. Jovanka said the Russians were greatly exaggerating their role. The Partizans liberated Belgrade, she said, the Soviet role was "back-up" (potpomoc). She said the Russians were on their way to Berlin from Bulgaria, via Belgrade

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and Budapest, but their role in defeating the Germans in the war was not decisive. Furthermore, she said, Soviet military behavior following the war was a huge headache for Tito. According to Jovanka, the Soviets acted as an occupying power in Yugoslavia, "which was humiliating since we liberated ourselves." She said the Belgrade area was full of marauding "Siberians and Central Asians thinking they could have their way with our Partizan women." The situation got so bad that then Yugoslav Ambassador to Russia, Milovan Djilas, had to ask Stalin to ask the troops to stop raping Yugoslav women, to which Stalin famously replied, "boys will be boys, they've been at war and need to unwind."

19. (C) Jovanka claimed that Tito and other Yugoslav communists who had spent time in Russia prior to WWII already were disappointed in the Soviet application of communism and Tito did not need much encouragement to exit the Comintern and reject the Soviet Union in 1948. She said she thought Stalin may have been relieved that Tito left the Comintern, considering him a possible rival for head of the international communist movement. People here have no idea what it's like to deal with the Russians, Jovanka said, which she considered a flaw in Serbian thinking.

10. (C) When asked what she thought of rehabilitation of Chetnik (Serbian royalist forces) General Drazo Mihajlovic and other Chetnik members and sympathizers, Jovanka said simply, "they lost." She claims early in the war she had set up two meetings between Tito and Mihajlovic, one in her village in the Croatian Krajina town of Knin. "They talked and slept side by side on straw mats," she claimed. The next morning, however, Tito's entire inner circle was almost wiped out when a booby-trapped bridge they were crossing blew up, killing a courier bringing up the rear of Tito's delegation. Jovanka said it was clear Mihajlovic and the Chetniks had used the negotiation as a ruse to wipe out Tito and there were no more talks after that. She admitted the subsequent fighting between the Partizans and Chetniks in Bosnia was particularly gruesome, but said, "by then the Chetniks were fighting alongside the enemy, the Germans."

Nonalignment and the Cuban Missile Crisis

¶11. (C) Jovanka defended the Nonaligned Nation Movement "during its time," during the Cold War. According to Jovanka, the nonaligned bloc might have affected the outcome of the Cuban Missile Crisis. "Khrushchev and Kennedy had to worry about the fate of nonaligned innocents as they ratcheted up their rhetoric," she said, and emphasized how enormously stressful it was for the world to watch the events unfold. When asked about the movement's relevance today, she asked, "is there even still a movement?" Referring to the current administration's overtures to the movement, she said, "typical, first they spit on the movement and then court it when they see an advantage."

Please Tell President Obama

¶12. (C) Jovanka said she had followed the U.S. elections very closely and was a big President Obama fan. She also was impressed by the way he treated his First Lady. "Please pass my message to him," Jovanka asked, "that I congratulate him on his Presidency, but that he should know how a former First Lady lives in abysmal conditions in Belgrade." Looking to Ljajic, Jovanka said, "if only Serbia had another politician like him, we could be something, but right now Ljajic is the only bright light in the Serbian political scene."

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Comment

¶13. (C) Jovanka is mostly interesting because she's been such forbidden fruit for so long. Her observations on WWII, particularly during the 65th anniversary of liberation, clarify the muddled picture Serbs themselves have about the war. Though she will play no further political role, her recollections of the Tito years and her views of current events are worth recording. End Comment.
BRUSH